ARCHETYPAL CHARACTERS IN CONTEMPORARY DETECTIVE FICTION: ROBERT GALBRAITH'S THE CUCKOO'S CALLING

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This article investigates the role of archetypes in contemporary detective fiction through a case study of Robert Galbraith's The Cuckoo's Calling. Archetypes are understood as universal models of character, situation, and symbolism that have shaped storytelling across cultures and historical periods. While their persistence has long been recognized in psychology and literary theory, their transformation within specific genres has not been sufficiently explored. The article clarifies theoretical distinctions between archetypes, stock characters, clichés, stereotypes, and tropes in order to avoid conceptual overlap and to provide a clearer framework for literary analysis. The analysis demonstrates how detective fiction relies on recurring figures such as the shrewd detective, the sidekick, the cunning criminal, and the innocent victim, alongside symbolic archetypes. Galbraith's novel illustrates both continuity with these traditions and subtle innovation. Cormoran Strike adapts the detective archetype by combining professional competence with personal vulnerability, while Robin Ellacott redefines the assistant role as an active and evolving partner. The victim figure of Lula Landry operates on both an individual and symbolic level, exposing systemic pressures within the fashion industry and emphasizing the link between personal tragedy and wider social context. By examining these adaptations, the article highlights how archetypes provide stability and recognition while also enabling renewal. Their use in detective fiction not only maintains reader engagement but also ensures that the genre continues to reflect contemporary concerns, combining the familiarity of tradition with the creativity of innovation.

Key words: detective fiction, archetype, stock character, cliché, stereotype, trope, symbol.

АРХЕТИПНІ ПЕРСОНАЖІ В СУЧАСНІЙ ДЕТЕКТИВНІЙ ПРОЗІ: РОМАН РОБЕРТА ҐАЛБРЕЙТА «КУВАЛА ЗОЗУЛЯ»

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У статті досліджується роль архетипів у сучасному детективному романі на прикладі твору Роберта Ґалбрейта The Cuckoo's Calling («Кувала зозуля»). Архетипи розглядаються як універсальні моделі персонажів, ситуацій і символів, що формували оповідь у різних культурах та історичних періодах. Попри те, що їх існування давно визнане у психології та літературознавстві, трансформацію архетипів у межах окремих жанрів досліджено ще недостатньо. У статті уточнюються теоретичні відмінності між архетипами, типовими персонажами, кліше, стереотипами й тропами, аби уникнути плутанини та забезпечити чіткішу основу для літературного аналізу. Аналіз показує, що детективна проза спирається на повторювані образи: кмітливого детектива, його напарника, підступного злочинця й невинну жертву, а також на символічні архетипи. У романі Галбрейта традиційні риси жанру поєднуються з новими творчими підходами. Корморан Страйк переосмислює архетип детектива, поєднуючи професійну компетентність з особистою уразливістю, тоді як Робін Еллакотт змінює уявлення про помічника, постаючи як активна партнерка, що розвивається. Образ жертви в особі Лули Лендрі функціонує водночас на індивідуальному та символічному рівнях, розкриваючи системний тиск у світі модної індустрії й підкреслюючи зв'язок між особистою трагедією та ширшим соціальним контекстом. Вивчення цих трансформацій засвідчує, що архетипи забезпечують стабільність і впізнаваність, водночає залишаючись відкритими до змін. Їх використання в детективному жанрі не лише підтримує інтерес читача, а й гарантує здатність жанру відображати сучасні проблеми, поєднуючи традиції з новаторством.

Ключові слова: детективна проза, архетип, типові персонажі, кліше, стереотип, троп, символ.

The persistence of recognizable patterns across world literature raises the question of why certain character types and narrative structures continue to appear throughout centuries of storytelling. Although this phenomenon has been widely observed, it has not been fully explained in scholarly research. While the universality of archetypes has been acknowledged in literary and psychological studies, the manner in which they evolve within specific genres – particularly detective fiction – remains only partially addressed.

The objective of this article lies in the analysis of the use and transformation of archetypes in Robert Galbraith's *The Cuckoo's Calling*. The study seeks to define the main theoretical distinctions between archetypes, stock characters, clichés, and stereotypes; to identify the principal character and symbolic archetypes of detective fiction; and to examine how Galbraith both employs and reshapes these figures to create narrative complexity and sustain reader engagement. The practical significance of this work lies in demonstrating how archetypes preserve continuity in narrative traditions while also being reshaped to reflect contemporary contexts. The contribution of this study is the clarification of the role of archetypes in modern detective fiction and the demonstration of their capacity for adaptation and renewal.

The recurrence of recognizable patterns across world literature raises the question of why certain elements appear repeatedly in works from different periods and traditions. From eighteenth-century novels to contemporary fiction, film, and television, audiences frequently encounter character types and narrative situations that seem strikingly familiar. Despite this recurrence, such works remain engaging, often producing the impression of novelty and originality.

Familiar patterns appear not only in canonical works but also in contemporary novels, film, and television. Readers and viewers often recognize character types and situations that seem familiar, even when they are presented in new contexts. Despite this repetition, such works remain engaging and often give the impression of novelty and originality. This paradox can be explained through the concept of an archetype treated as «an idea, symbol, pattern, or character-type, in a story. It's any element that appears again and again in stories from cultures around the world and symbolizes something universal in the human experience» [9].

The concept of archetypes is a set of timeless character roles, narrative structures, and symbolic images that have persisted across generations because they consistently contribute to meaningful and compelling storytelling. Archetypal characters resonate in literature because they embody essential truths about human experience. They serve as fundamental models of behaviour and identity that are recognizable across cultures, ensuring that readers and viewers connect with them at a deep psychological level.

Archetypes may be understood as the DNA of storytelling. They function as a universal language that transcends historical and cultural boundaries, allowing readers to connect with characters as if they were long-known companions. These patterns or ideal types provide the structural foundation upon which countless narratives are constructed, giving coherence and resonance to literary works throughout history.

Archetypes thus create a sense of familiarity even in an unfamiliar text, since they represent roles and experiences that audiences have repeatedly encountered. Although archetypal figures and situations have been presented in literature innumerable times, they retain the ability to produce surprise and originality [1].

The notion of archetypes has deep historical and philosophical roots. The term itself derives from the Ancient Greek words *archein* («to begin») and *typos* («type»), signifying an original model or foundational pattern. While the concept predates modern thought, it was the Swiss psychiatrist Carl G. Jung who popularised the term, linking it to his theory of the collective unconscious. Jung claimed that the archetypes as innate, universal psychic structures that shape human experience and behaviour. In his work, *The Structure of the Psyche*, he clarifies their function, stating that «The archetype is a symbolic formula which always begins to function when there are no conscious ideas present, or when conscious ideas are inhibited for internal or external reasons» [4]. These deep-seated structures are thus represented in consciousness as «pronounced preferences and definite tendencies», serving as the basic, unlearned templates for understanding and creating meaning in the world.

However, when these concepts are applied to literary theory, a unique set of definitions is required to properly situate the term within the field. This need for clarification stems from a key distinction in archetypal criticism. Iva Simurdić emphasizes this point directly: «Before several such definitions are examined, it needs to be specified that, although the Jungian term that was adopted by literary theory is *archetype*, what is actually meant within archetypal criticism is the *archetypal image*, not the *archetype itself*» [11, p. 41]. The difference is important, as the archetype functions as a deep psychological structure that cannot be directly represented in human consciousness or fully realized in artistic form. Therefore, in literary studies the archetype is understood and analysed through its manifestations – the recurring images, motifs, and narrative patterns that make the underlying structure perceptible within the text.

To prevent conceptual confusion, it is necessary to differentiate the archetypal image from the **stock character**, a term that refers to a conventional, genre-specific character type. Although these terms are sometimes used interchangeably, they refer to different phenomena. An archetypal character embodies a universal truth, while a stock character reflects a conventional role with clearly defined traits. As *Encyclopedia Britannica* explains, a stock character is «a character in a drama or fiction that represents a type and that is recognizable as belonging to a certain genre» [2]. Unlike stereotypes, stock characters are not necessarily negative, though they do often rely on familiar and widely recognizable conventions. Mark Lance further illustrates this point, noting that «A stock character ... is a stereotypical or archetypal character that can be seen as re-appearing in multiple stories. From the ancient Greek characters of Theophrastus and the epic heroes of national founding myths, to the hard-boiled detectives and femme fatales of film noir, literature is replete with stock characters» [8, p. 301].

The power of the literary archetype must be also distinguished from the **cliché**, which is a pattern that lacks the archetype's original and enduring narrative potential.

An archetype may represent the original model upon which other examples are based. A cliché, in contrast, is an idea that was once original but has become overused and predictable. It has lost its impact through repetition, like a story element left exposed until it no longer retains its vitality. While both archetypes and clichés are recognizable, archetypes provide the structural framework for creating meaningful stories, whereas clichés function only as predictable repetitions that lack depth or originality. The fundamental distinction lies in the concept's psychological vitality. For Carl G. Jung, who defined the archetype, it is not a mere cliché or a fossilized concept, but rather a «living system of reactions and aptitudes» that exists within the collective unconscious [5]. Jungian theory posits that the archetype possesses an inherent «autonomy and a numinosity» – a compelling, powerful quality – that gives it a dynamic role in shaping the individual psyche and cultural narratives. This contrasts sharply with the inert, superficial nature of a cliché.

This psychological depth translates directly into narrative complexity and cohesion. McLuhan and Watson emphasize the structural interconnectedness of archetypes in cultural expression, noting, «The cliché ... is incompatible with other clichés, but the archetype is extremely cohesive; other archetypes' residues adhere to it. When we consciously set out to retrieve one archetype, we unconsciously retrieve others; and this retrieval recurs in infinite regress» [10, p. 21]. Archetypes are therefore associated with narrative potential and complexity, while clichés are marked by superficiality and limited effect.

Another common source of confusion arises in the distinction between archetypes and **stereotypes**. Because of their similar sound, the two concepts are often conflated, yet they differ significantly. As Mary Kidd explains, «An archetype is the basic character that moves a story forward, such as Prince Charming as the hero and Cinderella as the Innocent, and is applicable in multiple cultures. However, stereotypes are very culture specific. In many cultures, certain groups are seen as possessing specific, often negative, characteristics» [6, p. 26]. This definition highlights a key contrast: archetypes provide universal narrative models that transcend cultural boundaries, whereas stereotypes are restricted to particular contexts and tend to reduce groups of people to simplified, often pejorative traits. Christopher Vogler develops this idea further, noting that «the archetypes are part of the universal language of storytelling, and a command of their energy is as essential to the writer as breathing» [12, p. 24]. In other words, while archetypes serve as flexible, recurring functions that enrich stories across cultures, stereotypes flatten characters into rigid caricatures that lack depth and vitality.

Archetypes also need to be distinguished from **tropes**. Tropes are recurring narrative devices, motifs, or conventions often confined to a particular genre or cultural context. An archetype, by contrast, is not limited to one tradition but reflects universal patterns of thought and imagination. The boundary between tropes and clichés is not always clear. For instance, the figure of the «damsel in distress» has appeared repeatedly in mythology, literature, and popular culture. Whether this figure should be regarded as a trope, a cliché, or an archetype remains a subject of scholarly debate [9].

While the number of archetypes is extensive, they are often grouped into three broad categories. *Character archetypes* are the most common, including figures such as the Hero, the Anti-Hero, the Trickster, the Seductress, the Mentor, or the Nightmare Creature. *Situational archetypes* refer to recurring plot lines such as «lost love, returning from the dead, or orphans destined for greatness». *Symbolic archetypes* are recurrent images that carry cultural or psychological weight across societies. These may be *trees* that symbolise nature and life, or *fire* that may represent both destruction and creativity [9].

The investigation of these recurring patterns is highly relevant to detective fiction as a literary genre of a rigid structure and focus on truth. The Encyclopedia Britannica defines the detective story as «a type of popular literature in which a crime is introduced and investigated and the culprit is revealed» [2]. It outlines the genre's traditional elements, including «(1) the seemingly perfect crime; (2) the wrongly accused suspect at whom circumstantial evidence points; (3) the bungling of dim-witted police; (4) the greater powers of observation and superior mind of the detective; and (5) the startling and unexpected denouement, in which the detective reveals how the identity of the culprit was ascertained» [2]. While the classic model, often called a whodunit, follows these conventions strictly, featuring a suspenseful investigation that reveals clues for the reader, the genre is diverse. Other forms include hardboiled stories that describe a darker «demi-world» with negative characters and brutal language; the historical mystery, which recreates the realities of a past era; and the psychological thriller, which focuses on the protagonist's study and decline, using suspense and puzzles to absorb the reader [7, pp. 104–108]. Regardless of the subgenre, the construction of the narrative relies fundamentally on recurring figures.

Detective fiction provides fertile soil for archetypal figures and structures, relying on widely recognized character and symbolic conventions to convey its core themes. The genre depends upon uncovering hidden truths and restoring order, and its narrative conventions are consistently enriched by recurring roles and symbolic patterns. Based on different critical approaches to the genre, we may often see the features of such archetypal characters manifesting as distinct descriptive roles. The shrewd detective typically serves as the central figure, characterized by intelligence, observation, and deductive reasoning. Closely related is the *sidekick*, who functions as the companion, operating as a necessary confidant and narrative foil. This duo is challenged by the cunning criminal, a figure who embodies manipulation and intellectual rivalry, posing as the primary antagonist. While the *innocent victim* may initially appear passive, their relationships often supply crucial clues, thus occupying the initial catalyst role for the investigation. To complicate the path to the truth, the red herring serves as the primary misdirection, misleading both the detective and the reader, while the *femme fatale* uses seduction and mystery to achieve her own ends as the seductive manipulator. In addition to the characters, symbolic archetypes such as the maze, shadows, and darkness amplify the thematic and atmospheric qualities of detective stories. By employing these established archetypes, authors construct narratives that resonate subconsciously with readers, while the true artistry lies in subverting or blending them in innovative ways.

Robert Galbraith's novel, *The Cuckoo's Calling*, is an example of a modern *who-dunit* that both employs and subtly subverts traditional archetypes and situations. Cormoran Strike exemplifies the *shrewd detective* archetype, although he diverges from the archetypal «brilliant» detective represented by figures such as Sherlock Holmes. Strike's characterisation is marked by realism, shaped by his professional background as a former military investigator who *«had been in possession of two legs then»*, a tacit reference to the limb he lost in Afghanistan [3]. His physical disability, together with his personal struggles, introduces a dimension of vulnerability rarely present in the archetypal detective figure.

Despite these challenges, Strike demonstrates careful observation and rigorous analysis. His methodical approach is evident in his *«perusal of the file»*, in which he examines witness statements and behavioural patterns, such as those of Evan Duffield, who is described as *«a man with a violent temper, who had admitted to attempting to force Lula to remain in the club»* [3]. His psychological insight, particularly his knowledge of the effects of heroin on behaviour, further illustrates his investigative competence: *«The drug rendered its slaves passive and docile; the absolute antithesis of shouting, violent alcoholics»* [3].

Strike's outsider position intensifies the archetype of the *private detective*. Operating beyond the authority of the police allows him both freedom and limitation. His lack of official access hinders his progress, as shown when he notes that *«the only page that the police had photocopied was the day before Landry's death»*, preventing him from fully tracing visitor movements [3]. This liminal status reinforces his role as a figure who navigates the boundaries of law enforcement and society, both empowered and constrained by his independence.

Robin Ellacott embodies the *sidekick* archetype, though her role is developed in ways that expand beyond traditional convention. She enters the narrative as a novice in investigative work: *«This was the first day of a week-long secretarial assignment... She had been temping ever since coming to live with Matthew in London» [3]. Her perspective as a newcomer mirrors the experience of readers who are also being introduced to Strike's world. London itself is depicted through her eyes as <i>«vast, complex and impenetrable»* [3], underscoring her inexperience while situating the reader in an equally unfamiliar landscape.

Robin's characterization balances vulnerability with resilience. When she is knocked down in a crowd, she asserts, «I'm fine. Listen, if you don't need me, I'll go», demonstrating self-possession and courage [3]. Unlike many traditional sidekicks, Robin is not limited to passive observation. She actively participates in the investigation, as in the moment when she «whipped her hand back out of the front of her coat as he re-entered the room», a detail that reveals her growing involvement [3]. Her intelligence and determination suggest the potential for her evolution into a professional partner, marking a modern reimagining of the archetypal assistant and recalling but also expanding upon the model of Dr. Watson.

The *criminal* archetype in *The Cuckoo's Calling* is defined by concealment and psychological depth. The investigation uncovers motives rooted in manipulation and

suppressed violence. Evan Duffield, for example, «admitted to having attempted to prevent his girlfriend leaving Uzi by seizing her by the upper arms» and is described as wearing «a wolf's-head mask when I wish to avoid the attentions of photographers» [3]. This symbolic act of disguise not only evokes menace but also highlights the criminal's ability to manipulate appearances.

The narrative also hints at Lula Landry's psychological fragility before her death. The testimony of her makeup artist reveals that Lula *«had not been herself»*, appearing *«low and anxious»*, and intending to *«leave 'everything' to her brother»* [3]. Such testimony suggests that the crime extends beyond physical violence to include psychological pressure and manipulation, adding layers of complexity to the criminal's role and posing a more nuanced intellectual challenge for Strike.

Lula Landry herself functions as the archetypal *innocent victim*. Although deceased from the outset, she remains central to the novel through memories, testimonies, and symbolic presence. The makeup artist recalls Lula as *«cheerful and excited about Deeby Macc's imminent arrival»*, yet also notes a shift in mood and anxiety [3]. Her career exposes *«a dark, convoluted, and often brutal underbelly»* of the fashion industry, where *«everyone wanted a piece of her»* [3]. This duality of glamour and exploitation situates her both as an individual character and as a symbolic victim of systemic pressures.

The official classification of Lula's death as suicide contrasts with the skepticism of her brother and others close to her. Her mother's insistence that Lula was *«perfectly happy»* during their final meeting, together with her belief that the death was accidental (*«perhaps a slip on an 'icy night'»*), reflects a determined denial of suicide [3]. This tension between official judgment and personal testimony generates ambiguity, which drives the investigative process and enriches the narrative complexity.

Symbolic archetypes further shape the novel's atmosphere. The *city* of London is described as *«vast, complex and impenetrable»* [3], evoking the archetype of the labyrinth and symbolizing both the complexity of the investigation and the obscured social networks of urban life.

Strike's detective agency represents a symbolic *Sanctuary*. His office is sparse and precarious, as indicated by the *«kitbag under the bare desk... contained everything he owned»*, suggesting both his instability and his capacity to create refuge within chaos [3]. The *«nondescript black-painted doorway»* with its *«scrappy piece of lined paper»* [3] symbolizes the threshold between ordinary appearances and hidden truths, a liminal space marking the transition into the investigative world.

Shadows and concealed motives dominate the narrative, evoking archetypal images of moral ambiguity. Lula's public photographs, which rendered her features *«abstract, generic»* [3], emphasize the disparity between external image and private reality. The omnipresence of her image symbolizes the fragmentation between public persona and personal identity, underscoring one of the novel's central concerns.

The analysis of Robert Galbraith's *The Cuckoo's Calling* shows that archetypes remain central to the construction and reception of detective fiction. Characters such as the detective, the assistant, the criminal, and the victim continue to structure the genre's narrative logic,

while symbolic images such as the labyrinth and shadows reinforce its thematic depth. Yet, Galbraith's novel demonstrates that these patterns are not static. By presenting Strike as a vulnerable yet competent investigator, Robin as a developing partner rather than a passive sidekick, and Lula as a victim whose story resonates beyond her individual fate, the novel reshapes traditional archetypes for a contemporary audience. This balance between continuity and innovation illustrates the dynamic quality of archetypes: they secure the recognizability of the genre while also accommodating new cultural, psychological, and social contexts. Detective fiction thus confirms the dual nature of archetypes as both stabilizing forces in literary tradition and adaptable frameworks that ensure the genre's ongoing vitality.

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